

Speculativism's Handy Guide to Human Psycho-Physical Functioning

I was puzzling for a long time over different systems which people have created for understanding the human relationship between the the mind and the body. Psychological analysers like Freud and Jung, along with various mystics and gurus like Gurdjieff, have attempted to sort out exactly how the mind-body relationship works.

Freud established that the mind uses the same physical energy on which also depends the functioning of the body. An important point to grasp because previous ideas had dealt with the mind as something ethereal and separate from physical life.

In Freud's work we see that the instinctive sexual or creative drive is behind most of hidden psychological activity. Freud also acknowledges the necessity of a duality of forces in the psyche. For Freud the polar opposite of the sexual drive or libido is the mortido or destructive drive. We can quite reasonably ask why we would have a drive which is destructive but the simple answer would be that our evolutionary ancestors needed the instinctive "fight or flight" mechanism to survive and so the bloody bashing and smashing of an opponent is certainly built into us by that evolutionary process.

Turning that destructive potential upon ourselves is, I believe, a symptom of the complex relationship between the individual and society. There's an area of overlap between psychology, sociology and anthropology. Here we see man, people, humans, whichever term you prefer functioning as tribal or family groups and internalising social elements in the form of the Superego and, in Jung's terminology, The Shadow.

Jung teaches us a different way of looking at the mind and body which respects the differences between individual personalities. For Jung we are not necessarily all cut from the same cloth. In addition to Freud's description of animal instinctive drives which function in the same way throughout the human species Jung acknowledges the existence and importance of four different personality types and each of these four is in an introvert or extrovert form.

Jung saves us from the fate of being forever a mere animal or biological machine. With Jung we can embrace the importance of individual development as unique Self. We find the way to this unique self through understanding our personality type and our individuality within the types.

Gurdjieff, on the other hand, approached the relationship between mind and body as though dealing with a sort of mystical machine. Combining the behaviourist and mechanistic style of approach with a quasi-religious sense of great purpose within the cosmos.

Gurdjieff is, of course, seldom taken seriously by the same people who study Freud and Jung or even Lévi-Strauss. However, behind Gurdjieff's "rascal guru" status and his posing as the "Big Man" who will regenerate the power of the tribe Gurdjieff was doing more than creating a theatrical cargo cult of borrowed terms. He was creating a space, physically and metaphorically, in which the position of culture and personality could be looked at from an entirely different angle than was usually possible.

American anthropologist Marshal Sahlins made a study of the "Big Man" culture on Pacific Islands where "The Man" is an individual who has risen to prominence in the tribe and commands respect because of his charisma and his ability to regenerate the tribe's identity and power both in subjective spiritual feeling and also in material possessions. The same phenomenon exists throughout all human cultures and I would offer Putin, Trump and Netanyahu as recent examples.

It is rare, however, for the Big Man to offer a deconstruction of the relationship between the group and the individual. Gurdjieff did this. Nevertheless it is also true that he achieved his strange microculture of construction while deconstructing by wrapping the whole thing up in a mythology of the spaceman skygod who is able to look at the human race from the external and superior view. The alien superego who tells us that he sees the heart of the matter.

The term "heart" is a much misunderstood term. It is common for one person to use "heart" to mean feeling and understanding while another person pooh-poohs this usage and declares that the "heart" merely pumps blood around the body. In reality the word "heart" can mean the centre of something. The heart of the city, the heart of the country, the heart of a cabbage, the heart of the Torah, the heart of Socialism, etc. etc. So pedants will attempt to sidetrack discussions with such trivia and red herrings but it's of no importance. We can talk about the heart of our understanding or about understanding in our heart. It's fine.

I've worked out a system for connecting the Gurdjieffian Three Centres to the Jungian Four Personality Types. The three Gurdjieff centres each contain three subordinate centres. This makes 9 centres in all except that the third centre in each triangle is always a "motor" centre which acts as the agent for the other centres and handles the "administration" or actualisation of the other centres' various functions.

In other words there are six centres of action (highlighted in blue) and three motor centres (highlighted in red).

The three motor centres are connected and they "make it happen" for the other centres. They are the agent or administrator or actualiser of the blue centres.

The Jungian "Types" refer to the psychology of people who operate mostly in 1 of the 3 centres to the partial exclusion of the other centres.

	Positive (loosely speaking)	Reactive or coping centres driven by the negative parallels of the first column	General dogsbody and factotum
Gurdjieff's Physical Centre - Jung's Sensation Type	Sexual	Instinctive	Motor
Gurdjieff's Emotional Centre - Jung's Feeling Type	Meaning	Release	Motor
Gurdjieff's Intellectual Centre - Jung's Thinking & Intuitive Types	Thinking	Intuitive	Motor

Sexual

The centre called “The Sexual Centre” by Gurdjieff has primary functions of sex and pleasure and secondary functions of all things attractive or beautiful. It is the same as Freud’s “The Sex Drive” but is also called The Libido or The Creative Drive and is all about everything we find attractive in any way whatsoever. The name “Sexual Centre” is misleading. Gurdjieff called it that but I would prefer the name “Pleasure Centre”.

Instinctive

The centre which Gurdjieff called “The Instinctive Centre” governs Fight or Flight reactions and all things antagonistic. It is also the opposite or negative pole to the Sexual or Creative. “Instinctive Centre” is a slightly misleading name for it because all of these centres represent functions of instinct. Jung wrote in “The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious” that the archetypes are none other than the instincts when interpreted by the imagination in the form of characters and stories or symbolic images.

These two centres (Sexual and Instinctive) together are the same as Gurdjieff’s concept of “The Physical Centre”. The third component is The Motor Centre which is found at all three levels: Physical, Emotional and Intellectual.

I would prefer to designate these two centres as “Pleasure versus Pain” or “The Centre of What You Want” versus “The Centre of What You Don’t Want”.

They are closely mapped to the Ego and the Shadow.

“Meaning”

It was my choice to use the word “meaning” here. Gurdjieff tells us that these systems are all triangles within triangles but doesn’t always give us the names for each and every component of those triangles. So we have to get creative and make our own terminology.

What I mean by “meaning” is the Emotional need to have some purpose or achievement in life. People will find meaning in a huge variety of different things: Family, Religion, Science, Art, Politics, Stamp Collecting, Gardening, Teaching, Working in a shop, Sport, Humanism, etc. etc. etc. Even nihilists will find some meaning in their lives by going around denying everything.

“Release”

“Release” is the name I have given to the Emotional need to let go of meaning and have fun. “Cutting Loose”. Playtime or Partytime when the drive toward meaning gets too “heavy”. The polar opposite of the need for meaning. These two centres, The Emotional Centres, have a relationship of Charge and Discharge of a quality I can call seriousness.

The third component of the Emotional Centre(s) is again the Motor Centre as it is at all levels. The Motor Centre is a little like the hub of a wheel. The other centres may perhaps be considered as the spokes, although I wouldn’t want that image to be taken too literally.

The Thinking Type or Centre

This is Jung’s classification of The Thinking Type of personality and is also one half of Gurdjieff’s concept of the “Intellectual Centre”. It is the Intellectual process of simple logic, mathematics, careful step-by-step understanding and scientific methodology.

The Intuitive Type or Centre

This is Jung’s classification of “The Intuitive Type” and is also the other half of Gurdjieff’s concept of the “Intellectual Centre”. It is the different intellectual process of “winging it”, making intuitive leaps to the answer, assuming a probability of correctness. Taking chances based on the sort of thing which usually works.

Motor

The “Motor Centres” have a job to do at all 3 levels, taking orders from the blue centres and translating those orders into action. Motor uses various forms of language and communication to “make it happen”.

These three motor centres are doing the same type of job but at physical, emotional and intellectual levels.

It would be possible to use the Gurdjieff “Enneagram” to picture the connections between these centres, putting the three motor centres together as the 3-6-9 triangle and so on and so forth. I don’t do that because it would get confusingly mixed up with all of the other ideas which different people around the world have put onto enneagram based philosophies. I prefer to not get into a potentially unlimited list of other people’s ideas, some perhaps right, some perhaps wrong. It would end up too entangled in contradictions.

Other Systems

It obviously would be possible for someone to attempt to connect these ideas to the system of “Chakras”. I don’t want to do that because I disagree with the philosophy espoused by many chakra teachers that we should all go through our lives in a state of blissfully perfect balance and anyone who doesn’t manage to do this must “have something wrong with their chakras”. I don’t accept that.

I accept that life is full of aches and pains and struggles and difficulties and, simply put, that is life. We are not perfect and shouldn’t expect to be. If anyone wants to connect these ideas to the chakras: feel free. I’m more interested in understanding how the human psycho-physical systems work than in trying to bring them into perfect balance. Gurdjieff’s ideas, of course, focus on balancing the physical, the emotional and the intellectual to produce a well rounded person. I like that idea but I don’t want to get obsessive about it. We all have a life to live in our own, unique, peculiar way.

Jung’s analysis of personality types is used to understand how to develop the creative process of the individual. To me individuality is one of the most important things in life. I don’t want to eliminate my personality and be reduced to some concept of an “essence”. I don’t want to be a happy robot. I want to be a grumpy human being.